

## Legend of the Miracle of Our Lady of Grace of Montenero

Legend holds that in 1345, a poor crippled shepherd boy was tending his flock near the foot of Montenero, when suddenly, a brilliant light appeared, and a heavenly fragrance filled the air. At the center of the light was an image of the Blessed Mother, and a voice spoke to him, asking him to carry the image to the top of Montenero. The voice assured him that he could complete the journey, despite his crippled leg and crutch. It took all the boy's strength to crest the summit, and at the top, he collapsed in fatigue. Then he felt a strange sensation in his leg, as though it had been "untied." Strengthened by the miracle, he bounded down the mountain waving his crutch over his head, exclaiming his gratitude to the Blessed Mother.

Following the shepherd boy's miraculous healing, a shrine was built on the site, and the miraculous image was placed atop the altar there. In the years that followed, more miraculous events took place which were attributed to the intervention of Our Lady of Grace of Montenero. The original church was extended and the present sanctuary dates from the late 18th century.



One of the most striking elements of the sanctuary is its massive collection of hundreds of ex-votos, or votive offerings to Our Lady of Grace of Montenero in gratitude or devotion for purported miracles. The collection began in the early 1800s, and includes simple folk-art images of fishermen, soldiers, children, and women; photos, letters, and personal objects; and traditional silver anatomical symbols.

This religious complex, known as the Santuario della Madonna di Montenero, is one of the most visited sanctuaries in the Livorno hills. Take in its peaceful chapel, caves used as a hideout for thieves over the centuries and a shelter during World War II, and impressive collection of 700 historic ex-votos. The best time to visit is the 8th of September for the Festa della Madonna, honoring Our Lady of Grace of Montenero, patron of Tuscany. Special Masses and other religious celebrations are held, and the sanctuary is lively with pilgrims and visitors.

